DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 119 515 FL 007 513

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TITLE "Cut-Eye" and "Suck-Teeth": African Words and Gestures in New World Guise.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 37p.; To appear in Journal of American Folklore, Jul-Sep 1976; Some pages may reproduce unevenly due to reproducibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *African Culture; *Body Language; Communication (Thought Transfer); Cultural Exchange; Cultural Factors; *Negro Culture; *Nonverbal Communication; *Paralinguistics
IDENTIFIERS Guyana; United States; West Indies

ABSTRACT

An investigation questioned whether the words and gestures "cut-eye" and "suck-teeth," evident in Guyana, represent African survivals, and how widely these are recognized in the Caribbean, the United States and Africa. Caribbean data were drawn from observations, dictionaries and interviews. U.S. data came from questionnaires administered to both blacks and whites. African students were also questioned. In Guyana, "cut-eye" is a visual gesture indicating hostility or disapproval. A glare is delivered followed by a vertical or diagonal sweep of the eye over the other person. "Cut-eye" insults by visually invading another's territory and turning away contemptuously. The gesture was familiar to all West Indians interviewed. In the U.S., nearly all black informants were familiar with the term, but few of the whites. All African informants recognized the gesture. "Suck-teeth" refers to the gesture of drawing in air through the teeth to produce a sucking sound. It expresses anger, exasperation or annoyance, and is stronger and ruder than "cut-eye." It is known throughout the Caribbean, by black Americans, though not by whites, and by Africans. The study provides evidence that Africanisms persist in the New World even in commonplace expressions and gestures. (CHK)

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ED119515

To Appear in Journal of American Folklore
July - September Issue, 1976

CUT-EYE AND SUCK-TEETH: AFRICAN WORDS AND GESTURES IN NEW WORLD GUISE

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John R. Rickford and Angela E. Rickford

Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth: African Words and Gestures in New World Guise

In the New World, things African are usually associated with the unusual and the exotic. Thus cumfa, with its frenzied drumming, would seem a natural candidate for inclusion in any list of African "survivals". So also would a folk-tale or folk-song which included several lines of obscure incantation. Or a word which made use of very un-English phonotactics, like kpoli, or was matched against a more standard equivalent (nyam vs. eat).

Our suspicions would be particularly aroused if the cultural or linguistic item were rarely used. If, for instance, we "got" it for the first and only time from the aging grandchild of some erstwhile slave, now living an isolated life far from the masses of the people. For academics and laymen alike, it is of such stuff that true New World Africanisms are made.

In keeping with this pattern of intuition and reasoning, we never attached any historical significance to cut-eye and suck-teeth. The gestures to which these referred were performed daily in our native Guyana by all kinds of people, in urban center and rural area

alike. And the compounds we used to describe them could hardly have been more ordinary, composed as they were of simple English words - cut, eye, suck and teeth. With such unpromising clues to go by, it is hardly surprising that we used them everyday without giving any thought to their source.

However, while doing graduate work in Philadelphia in 1971, we happened to notice a curious division between American Whites and Blacks with respect to these very gestures. While the Blacks would "cut their eyes" and "suck their teeth" in much the same way that people did in our native community, Whites apparently never did, and were often ignorant of the meanings of these gestures when they were directed at them.

On the basis of this chance observation, we began to consider the possibility that both the gestures and the words we used to describe them might represent African "survivals", and began to study more systematically the extent to which they were used and recognised across three broad areas: the Caribbean, the United States, and Africa. This paper reports on the results of this investigation.

We shall first briefly describe the methods we used to obtain data on these areas, and then summarize the findings for cut-eye and suck-teeth under separate headings. In the

conclusion, we discuss some of the larger implications and research directions which grew out of our research.

I: Method

Data on the use of cut-eye and suck-teeth in the Caribbean area was obtained from several sources. For the detailed physical and ethnographic descriptions of the gestures in Guyana we drew mainly on our own observations and experience, supported by comments and criticisms from fellow Guyanese. For other areas in the West Indies, we first consulted available dictionaries and glossaries,[1] then carried out our own interviews with several West Indians, representing Antigua, Barbados, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and St. Kitts.

Data from the United States is based on original fieldwork conducted by the authors. Within the framework of a questionnaire designed to explore linguistic and cultural differences between Black and White Americans,[2] we asked the following question:

> "Now we want to consider some things that people say and use a lot. Do you know what the following things mean (in terms of the actions and "social significance"):
>
> 1. To "cut your eyes" on someone _____"
> 2. To "suck your teeth" _____"

In each case, the informant was asked to give a physical demonstration and to discuss the meaning freely. A corpus of seventy American informants was interviewed, in Philadelphia,

Boston and New York. Thirty-five of these were Black, and thirty-five were White. Within each group, there were eighteen males and seventeen females. Informants represented a diverse range of native geographical backgrounds, including Pennsylvania, New York, California, Alabama, Georgia, Illinois and Massachussetts.

Our African data was limited by the small number of accessible informants, and by the fact that so few dictionaries of African Languages had entries classified in terms of English. Nevertheless, among students at the University of Pennsylvania and in Guyana, we managed to locate speakers of the following languages: Twi, Temne, Mende, Igbo, Yoruba, Swahili, Luo, Banyang, Krio, and Cameroon Pidgin. They were first asked if they were familiar with the gestures, and then to provide data on their use and equivalent terms from their native languages if any existed.

II: Cut-Eye

In Guyana, cut-eye is a visual gesture which communicates hostility, displeasure, disapproval, or a general rejection of the person at whom it is directed. The very existence of a well-known term for this particular gesture indicates its centrality in the wide range of gestures in the culture, not all of which have comparable verbal labels.

The basic cut-eye gesture is initiated by directing a hostile look or glare in the other person's direction. This may be delivered with the person directly facing you, or slightly to one side. In the latter position, the person is seen out of the corners of the eyes, and some people deliberately turn their bodies sideways to achieve this effect. After the initial glare, the eyeballs are moved in a highly coordinated and controlled movement down or diagonally across the line of the person's body. This "cut" with the eyes is the heart of the gesture, and may involve the single downward movement described above, or several sharp up-and-down movements. Both are generally completed by a final glare, and then the entire head may be turned away contemptuously from the person, to the accompaniment of a loud suck-teeth. (See illustration A for the main stages of this sequence).

Part of the effectiveness of a cut-eye as a visual "put-down" lies in its violation of what Erving Goffman has called the "information preserve" of the individual, one of his important "territories of the self." [3] The information preserve is "the set of facts about himself to which an individual expects to control access while in the presence of others," including "what can be directly perceived about an individual, his body's sheath and his current behaviour, the issue here being his right not to be stared at or examined (emphasis ours)" [4] As Goffman goes on to point out, since staring constitutes an invasion of informational

preserve, it can then be used as "a warranted negative sanction against somebody who has misbehaved."[5]

A cut-eye provides even more of a "negative sanction", since one not only invades, but with the eyes, rummages up down and about in another's preserve. It is as if the recipient has no power to prevent this visual assault, the very fact that someone else's eyes can run right over him like this proclaiming his worthlessness. The "cut" is made even deeper when the eyes are finally turned away - the implication here being that the victim is not even worth further attention.

This kind of visual "put-down" or "cut-down" comes to the fore in "buseings" or fierce arguments between two or more protagonists, especially between women. The argument is waged as much with words as with eyes, each protagonist "cutting up the eyes" on the other in a threatening and belligerent fashion. But there may not be any verbal argument at all. In any situation where one wishes to censure, or challenge someone else, convey to him that you don't admire or respect him, a cut-eye may be conveniently employed.

Thus an old woman rebuking an eight-year old for hitting her younger brother on the street might receive a cut-eye from the child (challenging her authority to intervene) in response. Similarly, a male who whistles at a female may be met with a cold cut-eye suggesting that she does not appreciate this form of greeting,

and that he fails to win her interest or favour. In both these cases, the recipient is guilty of some infringement of what the sender considers his "rights", and the provocation for the cut-eye is clear (whether others consider it justified, or appropriate is another matter).

Sometimes however, the "misbehaviour" which earns someone a cut-eye is not as obvious on the surface. The recipient need not have said or done anything to the person who directs the gesture to him. But there is something in the way he dresses, looks or behaves which, while not necessarily intended to, rubs someone else the "wrong way". This is particularly true if others around interpret the situation as one in which the recipient is trying to "show off". If for instance someone drives up in a big new car, or arrives at a party in expensive clothes on the arm of a well-known figure, others around might cut their eyes on that person as a way of suggesting that they are not really impressed. The cut-eye is a way of saying "you're no big thing at all, not to my mind at least."

In fact however, it frequently is the case that the recipient is someone in a situation which many people, including the sender, respect and envy. Thus, while the gesture might express genuine resentment and dislike, it is sometimes an attempt to nullify the appeal of another's attributes or circumstances when these

are precisely what you yourself would like to have. This is clearer when the sense in which people also talk of cutting their eyes on something is considered. A woman who sees a prohibitively expensive dress in a store window might report to her friends that she had to "cut her eyes" on it and walk away. The phrase is used here to symbolize a rejection of something one would really like to have, but cannot or should not because of personal circumstance.

The gesture of cut-eye is performed most frequently (and most skilfully!) by women. Men do not use this gesture as often, and may experience real difficulty in trying to imitate the darting, highly coordinated movements which women can control. The gesture is often used when the other party in an encounter, conversation or dispute is enjoying his "turn" to talk, and may prompt the latter to interrupt his turn to give a more powerful cut-eye or some form of verbal retort in return. One common verbal retort is "Look, cut-eye na a kill daag" ("Cut-eye doesn't kill dogs"). This acknowledges that an invasion or affront has been made, but attempts to vindicate the recipient by claiming that it can do him or her no bodily harm.[6]

Another pattern can be seen in a turn of the century description of a classic type of court dispute.[7] In the course of giving his testimony, the complainant notices that the defendant has "cut his eye" on him. He interrupts his testimony to ask "A who you a cut you yiye pon?" ("Who are you cutting your

eyes on?"), to which the defendant simply replies, "you see um" (which is roughly equivalent to "if the shoe fits, wear it!"). In this particular incident, the exchange was followed by further verbal provocation and retort which is often called "shotting" or "rhyming" in Guyana, "talking broad" or "rhyming" in other Caribbean territories.[8]

The physical and ethnographic account of cut-eye given above still does not tell the whole story, but we have attempted to make it reasonably detailed partly because of the limited data available on patterns of non-verbal communication generally, and also because we hope it might be more easily recognisable elsewhere by other researchers. As we ourselves discovered since beginning this study, it is certainly known and used in other parts of the Caribbean. The term is listed in the Dictionary of Jamaican English for what is clearly the same gesture with the same meaning:

> "Cut-Eye: to catch (someone or something) with the eyes, then quickly close them and turn or toss the eyes aside. The purpose of the action may be to avoid temptation... but it is usually directed against another person... and is usually insulting."[9]

The editors also add that the action may combine insult and temptation into provocation, and cite the following definition from Miss Joyce Nation:

> "To cut one's eyes is to toss one's head away from a man's glance in a contemptuous but sexually provoking fashion: Little girl to a little boy, 'You come a me yard' (cutting her eyes) 'come if you name man'." [10]

While this "provocative" use of cut-eye is also found in Guyana, it is usually distinguished from the more hostile use of the gesture in very subtle ways, involving different privileges of co-occurence with other paralinguistic features or "kinesic markers." [11] The difference may reside in nothing more than whether the cut-eye is accompanied by a slight smile, or by a suck-teeth, and sometimes males misread the meaning of a female's cut-eye, to their own embarrassment.

The term, the gesture and its meaning as discussed above were all instantly recognised by the various West Indians whom we interviewed. From Karl Reisman (personal communication) we also learned that it can be frequently observed in Antigua. A Haitian informant provided a dramatic demonstration of the gesture as soon as it was mentioned, and explained that it was known in Haiti as "couper yeux" - literally " to cut (or cutting) the eyes." We find it very striking that the Haitian expression for this gesture should consist of morphemes which literally refer to cut and eye. The same phenomenon may be observed in Saramaccan (example provided by Ian Hancock): a ta koti woyo - ""she's cutting eye." These examples seem to suggest different New World relexifications

of an expression which existed either in one or more African languages or in a Proto-Pidgin, and which included morphemes for cut and eye. We will return to this point briefly when considering the data from African languages.

The results of our questionnaire investigation of familiarity with cut-eye in the United States were more dramatic than we expected.

Sex	Blacks		Whites	
Males	(n=18)	16	(n=18)	2
Females	(n=17)	17	(n=17)	2
Total	(n=35)	33	(n=35)	4

Table 1: Number of American informants familiar with cut-eye according to race and sex.

As Table 1 indicates, almost all the black informants were familiar with the term. Among the "meanings" volunteered were: "a look of disgust"; "expression of hostility"; "to threaten"; "act of defiance or disapproval"; "bad feelings"; "when you're mad at someone"; "to show you don't like somebody." All the Black women understood the term and were able to perform the gesture easily and expertly.

Two of the Black women were not familiar with the term. The other sixteen, though clearly aware of the meaning of the gesture, could not execute it as skilfully as their female

counterparts, and kept excusing themselves by saying, "Mostly women do that." As we have noted above, this situation is paralleled in the Caribbean. Some of the men felt it would be a "cop-out" for a man to keep using this gesture to express his feelings — physical or verbal expression ("sounding") would be the more masculine thing to do. Barring this, one should simply "keep one's cool" — remain silent, apparently unperturbed.

As Table 1 also indicates, cut-eye as a lexical item and as a cultural form of behaviour is almost totally unknown to White Americans. Only four of the thirty-five White informants displayed familiarity with the term. Of these, three gave "to stare at someone," and the other volunteered "to look at someone out of the corner of the eye." These are good descriptions of the initial stage of the gesture, but not of the complete sequence. And in none of the cases could a White informant execute the full gesture.

Sixteen Whites plainly admitted that they had never heard the term before, and had no idea of its meaning. The other fifteen in the sample provided idiosyncratic and highly varied responses: "expression of religious ecstasy"; "to go to sleep on someone"; "to stop looking at someone"; "expression of horror"; "to look at someone attractively for a long time." This sharp divergence between the responses of Blacks and Whites is all the more revealing because many of the Black informants were middle-class individuals completing

their college education, and might otherwise be considered highly acculturated to mainstream American culture.

Some of the Black informants mentioned that "rolling the eyes" is sometimes used instead of "cutting the eyes" in Black American communities to refer to the very same gesture. This is confirmed in Keith Johnson's description of "rolling the eyes" among American Blacks, which accords with our own description of cut-eye in Guyana on several points.[12] Unless it omits certain details, however, the following description from another researcher would suggest that the physical movements involved in "rolling the eyes" might be slightly different:

> "...if a girl in a lounge does not want to be bothered when a cat comes up to rap, she might lift up one shoulder slightly, rolling her eyes upward in her head as though saying, 'what a drag!'."[13]

Whether or not this is the case, note that the meaning and usage of the gesture still register dislike, disapproval, or hostility. The fact that the general public usually associates "rolling the eyes" with ingratiation and "Uncle Tom" behaviour (an image partly propagated by television and the cinema) suggests that Blacks might have endowed the gesture with a systematic ambiguity which they exploited to permit safe and subtle expression of their more genuine feelings. As we shall see later, suck-teeth can be similarly used with a strategic ambiguity.

Before going on to present the results of our research on cut-eye with African informants, a few remarks are in order. Several scholars have attempted to pinpoint the African languages which for various historical reasons may be assumed to have had the greatest influence on the various New World pidgins and creoles. The lists are somewhat different from one scholar to another,[14] and the relative importance of particular languages (like Wolof) is a matter of some dispute.

The absence of universal agreement in this area is sometimes problematic. When considering possible etymologies for New World forms, it can be difficult to determine which languages must be examined and what weight must be assigned to the evidence of one language as against another. However, this problem is not always as critical as it might seem, because as many observers have noted, many New World Africanisms go back to generalised features of West Africa, even of sub-saharan African as a whole.[15] Given the multiplicity of areas from which slaves were taken, it is easy to see why this might have been so. "Survivals" were more likely to survive if they were supported by the common experience of Africans from several areas and tribal affiliations, rather than restricted to a single group.

We cannot claim to have exhausted all the "key" languages in the lists referred to above. However, the picture which emerges from the languages for which we do have data is that the concept of a cut-eye or suck-teeth gesture is familiar in several areas

of both West and East Africa, and is described by a verbal label in many of the languages spoken there.

The Mende, Banyang, and Luo examples make use of morphemes with the literal meaning of "cutting the eyes" or "sucking the teeth", and thus provide the kind of models we would need to classify our New World compounds as straight cases of loan-translation. However, we are in no position to claim that any one of these provided the immediate source. Neither Banyang (a "minor" language spoken in Cameroon) nor Luo (an East Coast language) are normally rated as "key" languages where the business of seeking etymologies for New World forms is concerned. Mende certainly is a "key" language in this sense, but several others for which we do not have data may provide equally plausible prototypes for loan-translation. The whole point of our discussion is that all this is not crucial. We shall probably never know which language or languages provided the immediate source; wherever the particular description of "cutting the eyes" may have come from, it received support from the fact that what it referred to was familiar everywhere.

All of the African informants with whom we talked, for instance, recognised the cut-eye gesture immediately. They provided the following equivalent expressions:

Twi: obu ma ni kyi — "He breaks the back of the eye on me."[16]

Yoruba: mǵlójú[17] — "making expressions with your eyes to show disapproval." R. Abraham also lists

mónlojú cross-referenced to món (D.2) under which the following items are listed: (I) ó mónjú — "he looked away contemptuously." (II) ó món mi lójú — "he looked at me in scorn." (III) àwòmonjú — "a scornful look."[18]

Cameroon Pidgin: no kɔt yo ai fɔmi — "Don't cut your eye on me."

Banyang: a kpot a mek ne me — "She cut her eyes on me."

Luo: kik ilokna wangi — "he is cutting his eyes."

Swahili: usinioloka macho — "to roll one's eyes."

The last two languages provide an interesting comparison. They are both spoken in Kenya, Swahili as the more widespread and better known East African lingua franca. The terms in Luo and Swahili correspond to the two American variants: to "cut" and to "roll" the eyes respectively. Data from other languages may provide other possible sources for the alternation between these terms.

III. Suck-Teeth

Suck-teeth refers to the gesture of drawing air through the teeth and into the mouth to produce a loud sucking sound. In the basic suck-teeth gesture, the back of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate and a vacuum created behind a closure formed in the front part of the mouth. This closure may be made with the lower lip against the upper teeth (as in illustration 2), or with the tip or blade of the tongue just behind the upper teeth

on the alveolar ridge (as in illustration 1, though not clearly seen). When the closure is suddenly relaxed, air outside the mouth rushes in audibly.

The gesture is accomplished by the same velaric ingressive mechanism used to produce the "clicks" of Khoisan and Southern Bantu languages.[19] The differences lie mainly in the fact that the closure for "clicks" may be formed at several other points in the mouth, and that while "clicks" are stops — produced by one sharp release of the closure, a suck-teeth is more like a prolonged fricative — after the closure is relaxed, air continues to rush in turbulently through the narrow opening.

There are all kinds of minor variations in the way the gesture is produced. It can be made with the lips tensely pouted, or with them spread out, or pulled to one side. There are variations in the duration and intensity of the sound produced depending on the tightness of the closure and the pressure of the inrushing air. These variations depend to some extent on personal habit, but are governed also by the situation — how angry you are, whether you are in a place (like a church) or in company (a circle of your parents' friends) in which a loud suck-teeth might be frowned on. In general however, the longer and louder the suck-teeth, the more forceful and expressive its "meaning".

Suck-teeth, also known in Guyana and the Caribbean as stchoops (-teeth) or chups (-teeth), is an expression of anger,

impatience, exasperation or annoyance. It shares some of the semantics of cut-eye and as mentioned before, is often used in combination with the latter. It can be more open and powerful however, and is considered ill-mannered in certain situations. For instance, while people of all ages do it when something annoys them or someone makes them angry, its use by children in the presence of their parents or other adults is considered rude and insubordinate. As J. Cruickshank noted in 1916: "A sulking child is told sharply, 'Wha you suck you teeth fo?' ...With eyes lowered and lips pouting, it pictures disgust, discontent — rebellion with the lid on."[20]

The prohibitions against the use of this gesture are sometimes justified by the claim that it means "kiss my ass" or "kiss my private parts." This meaning may have become attached to it because of the close resemblance between the sound made in producing a suck-teeth and the sound sometimes made for "calling off" a girl on the street. This latter sound is made with pouted lips (the teeth not involved as articulators), and is supposed to represent a forceful kiss (amongst other things). It has much cruder sexual connotations than other ways of attracting a girl's attention (like whistling, or saying psssssss), and these seem to be attached also to the suck-teeth sound.

To avoid actually sucking the teeth in situations where it might be considered vulgar or ill-mannered, people sometimes say the words stchoops or chups without making the sound itself.

Other interjections like cha, cho, or shoots may also be used, and children in particular will purse or pout their lips as if preparing to make a suck-teeth, but again, without making any audible sound. The advantage of this latter strategy is that it can be carried out behind the back of a reproachful adult without fear of discovery or reprimand.

Interviews with informants from Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Antigua, and even Haiti (where, we understand, it is sometimes referred to as tuiper or cuiper) confirmed familiarity with this oral gesture, its meaning, and the social prohibitions against its use as outlined above. In Antigua, according to Karl Reisman (personal communication), stchoops to describe the action of sucking one's teeth is convergent with the word for "stupid", and the ambiguity is well expolited ("Wuh yuh stchoopsin yuh teeth fuh? Yuh stchoops or wuh?"). This reinforces the negative social connotations of the gesture.

The West Indian dictionaries and glossaries all contain some reference to suck-teeth or the alternate terms stchoops and chups. The Dictionary of Jamaican English defines suck-teeth as "a sound of annoyance, displeasure, ill-nature or disrespect (made) by sucking air audibly through the teeth and over the tongue."[21] Hyman Rodman refers to it as an "expression of disdain or mild disgust," and gives as an example of its usage: "When I suggested that she visit them, she said stchoops."[22]

Frank Collymore, writing on Barbados, describes it as indicative of distruct or sulking, but attempts also a more

detailed classification of the different kinds of chupses or suck-teeth which is worth reprinting:

> "(i) the chupse of 'amused tolerance,' used in retort to some absurd remark or statement, a sort of oral shrugging of the shoulders; (ii) the chupse 'self-admonitory' when the chupser has done something of which he has no occasion to be proud; (iii) the chupse 'disdainful,' accompanied by a raising of the eyebrow; (iv) the chupse 'disgusted,' in the performance of which the eyebrows are almost closed; (v) the chupse 'sorrowful,' in reality a series of quickly emitted chupses, the head being shaken slowly from side to side; (vi) the chupse 'offensive and abusive;' (vii) the chupse 'provocative,' a combination of (iii), (iv) and (vi) which often leads to blows."[23]

This description certainly seems to justify the statement, attributed by Collymore to the lead-writer of the Barbados Advocate, that "the chupse is not a word, it is a whole language... the passport to confidence from Jamaica to British South America."[24]

The immediately preceding statement appears, however, to have set the northern limits of the area in which chupse or suck-teeth is known too close. This is clear from table 2, which reveals that many Black Americans are also familiar with it.

Sex		Blacks		Whites
Males	(n=18)	10	(n=18)	0
Females	(n=17)	14	(n=17)	1
TOTAL	(n=35)	24	(n=35)	1

Table 2: Number of American informants familiar with suck-teeth according to race and sex.

If we compare table 2 with table 1, it is clear that Black Americans are slightly less familiar with suck-teeth than with cut-eye (nine persons who recognised the latter failed to recognise the former). But the recognition rate is still quite high (68.5%), with the Black females again slightly in the lead.[25] Among the "meanings" given by Black informants were: "when disgusted"; "act of defiance, disapproval"; "sign of frustration"; "impatience"; "to show disappointment."

What is particularly striking about table 2, however, is that only one White American, a woman, was familiar with suck-teeth. Twenty-six of the White informants did not even attempt to suggest possible meanings, and the eight who did were far off the intended track: "to shut up"; "to stammer"; "to express that you like food"; "after eating to clean teeth." This last "meaning" was suggested by four informants, and in fact is the only one given for "sucking the teeth" in the Oxford English Dictionary. Under

entry 10b for the verb suck is listed: "to apply one's tongue and inner sides of the lips to (one's teeth) so as to extract particles of food."

Now while West Indians rarely speak of "sucking the teeth" in this "Standard English" sense, they sometimes use it as a cover or excuse for the everyday suck-teeth of annoyance or insubordination. For example, a student who responds to the teacher's instructions to write an essay in class with an inadvertent suck-teeth, might claim as she approaches him with an icy stare, that he was just "trying to clean out his teeth." Given the demonstrated divergences between what Black and White Americans most commonly understand by this gesture, it is not at all difficult to imagine that many a slave might have been able to use it on his masters with equally feigned innocence, to express feelings of exasperation and rage for which their was no other outlet.

As early as 1951, Richard Allsopp had observed that "words exist in West and East African languages which contain a sound produced by sucking air between the teeth. What connection this may have with sulking or defiance, however, as it does in our (Guyana) dialect, I do not know."[26] It is not clear from this whether Allsopp is referring to the famous "clicks" of certain African languages (which so far as we know, have no connection with rudeness or defiance). However our interviews with African informants some two decades later confirmed that they were in fact

familiar with the gesture, and that many of their languages had verbal labels referring to it. Some of the African informants pointed out spontaneously that "sucking your teeth" in front of your parents was very rude, likely to earn you a slap or a whipping. This is, as we pointed out before, also true of Guyana and the rest of the Caribbean.

The African equivalents for suck-teeth which we collected were:

Mende: i ngi yongoi vofoin ɔ nyɔ nɔ — "He sucked his teeth on me" (literally, "He his teeth sucked me on").[27]

Temne: tós nɛ̀ — "to suck to self"

Igbo: ímɔ osɔ̀ — "to make a sucking noise with the mouth"

Yoruba: kpǒsé — (vb.) "to make a sucking noise with the mouth"

ǒsé — (n.) "sucking noise made with the mouth"[28]

Luo: ichiya — (vb.) "to make suck-teeth noise"

chiyo — (n.) "suck-teeth noise"

Krio: no sɔk yu tit pan mi — "Don't suck your teeth on me"

no sɔk tit mi — "Don't suck-teeth me"

Cameroon Pidgin: no sɔk yɔ tif fɔ mi — "Don't suck your teeth on me."

There is the possibility too that chups and stchoops also have their roots in an African expression for the gesture involving the word "suck." We had always assumed that these were merely onomatopoeic creations for the sound made in sucking one's teeth. But as Hancock pointed out (personal communication), the Papiamentu and Sranan expressions for the gesture include a morpheme tsupa, which is very similar of course, to chups or stchoops. It may derive from the Portuguese chupar, which, not surprisingly, means "to suck." But it is also significant that in Gambian Krio ("Aku"), the term for suck-teeth is tšipu, adopted from Wolof. As Hancock himself was the first to suggest, the Caribbean forms chups and stchoops may possibly represent a convergence of the Portuguese and Wolof forms.

If chups and stchoops turn out to be more than mere onomatopoeic New World creations, so also do the other equivalents or substitutes mentioned above: cho, chu, and tcha. There is first the possibility that these are merely abbreviated forms of chups. But there are other possibilities. The Dictionary of Jamaican English describes cho (with variants /cho, cha, chut, chu/) as "an exclamation expressing scorn, disagreement, expostulation, etc.", and provides two possible West African sources: "Ewe tsóò — interjection of astonishment, anger, impatience, disappointment," and "Twi twéaa — interjection of uttermost contempt."[29] The editors add that "English tcha can hardly be the source," because the earliest citations for tcha in the Oxford English Dictionary

are later (1844, 1887) than the Jamaican attestations (1827, 1835).[30] In fact, far from being the source, English tcha may well be a later reflex of the Ewe or Twi interjections, perhaps via the Caribbean forms cho and cha.

This expanding net-work of possible African derivations which grew out of our original research into suck-teeth does not end here. After reading an earlier version of this paper, Ian Hancock mentioned that the Yoruba have a term (sǔmú, sǔtì) for the gesture we discussed above of pursing the lips for a suck-teeth without actually making the sound. We wrote back, without taking it too seriously, that people sometimes refer to this in Guyana as faul biti maut ("mouth shaped like a fowl's behind"). When Hancock replied excitedly that speakers of Krio in Sierra Leone also use this very metaphor — luk we yu de mek yu mɔt lɛkɛ fɔl yon ("look how you make your mouth like a fowl's behind"), we felt the similarity could hardly be due to coincidence. Once again we were struck by the pervasiveness of the African influence which lurks behind so many of the symbols, patterns and institutions we manipulate in the New World from day to day.

IV. Conclusion

Cut-eye and suck-teeth provide clear evidence that "Africanisms" in the New World may reside not only in the exotic, but also (and perhaps more frequently) in the commonplace. In general, the identity of such items will not be obvious, either

to "natives" or "outsiders". However, it may be revealed by careful attention to disparities in usage between Whites and Blacks, and to the recurrence of the same patterns in different communities which have sizeable African-derived populations.

To discover other non-verbal patterns, we need to be interested not just in rare and elaborate rites, but also in the more "ordinary" rituals involved in everyday behaviour: how people walk and stand; how they greet and take their leave of each other; what they do with their faces and hands when conversing, narrating or arguing, and so on. Karl Reisman has come across some examples of just this type in Antigua quite recently,[31] and of course Herskovits had suggested several others over three decades ago which still warrant further investigation.[32]

In terms of linguistic survivals, we can translate the need to look for the commonplace into an increased alertness for loan-translations and cases of convergence between English (or other European) and African forms. Like cut-eye and suck-teeth, these will look like ordinary English words; sometimes it is only the subtlest "non-English" shades of meaning and usage which will help to give them away.[33] In fact, where a particular form and meaning have become generalised to almost every part of the English-speaking world,[34] we will not have even this clue. Difficulties of this sort (and others) can make the search for loan-translations and convergences more harrowing than the search for direct loans of the nyam and goober type.

On the other hand, the very English facade which makes them difficult to recognise today has undoubtedly helped them to survive in larger numbers. Like cut-eye and suck-teeth they may be actively used amongst those people who are striving most consciously towards the prestigious "standard" language and culture, and in whose speech direct African loans like nyam are unlikely to be found.

There is an additional significance to the study of loan-translations and convergences. As Dalby has suggested, they must have been invaluable in the creation and maintenance of a subtle code by means of which slaves could communicate with each other without fear of detection or punishment by Whites.[35] From our suggestions above, too, of the ways in which the gestures discussed in this paper might have been passed off with more acceptable "meanings" (cut-eye as ingratiation, suck-teeth as the effort to remove food from the teeth), it is clear that the code was not restricted to linguistic material. Both verbal and non-verbal resources were utilized for its creation. Cut-eye and suck-teeth, Africanisms both as words and as gestures, are themselves evidence of this.

Other examples abound. Reisman notes the existence of a side-up turn of the head in Antigua which seems to be of African origin; it is used today as a greeting, but it also resembles a Euro-American head-gesture which might have been used as a command ("Come over here!") in the plantation environment.[36] Investing the

latter gesture with the "African" interpretation of a salutation would have provided a measure of personal satisfaction, "a way to redress the harshness of the slavery situation."[37] Similar to this is the story told to us by Richmond Wiley, a native of the South Carolina Sea-Islands, of a slave who used to answer his master's queries and commands with the words "You-ess, sir!" The insult, so obvious to his fellow slaves, was passed off on the master as the slave's slurred pronunciation of "Yes sir."

More urgently and directly communicative was the way slaves would raise the spiritual refrain "Wait in the Water" from one plantation to the next to warn a runaway that bloodhounds were on his trail - a signal interpreted by the masters as their expression of religious zeal. In all these cases, the existence of public and more "acceptable" interpretations is exploited by Blacks for the communication of more private or "unacceptable" meanings.[38] The value of Africanisms in this more general strategy is that they provided one of the sources (though not the only one) of its fuel.

As we hope this paper has itself been able to demonstrate, there is more to be done with "Africanisms" than presenting them in a list with possible sources. Viewed from the standpoint of different cultures and social groupings in both the present and the

past, they have reams to tell us about how peoples of African descent adapted to the experience of the New World, and how much they were understood by their social and political superiors. Finally, as we should like to stress again, the most telling Africanisms from this point of view might involve the most ordinary items of everyday behaviour — how that person is looking at you across a room, or what that woman is yelling down the street.

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FOOTNOTES

1. These include: Frederic G. Cassidy and Robert B. LePage, eds., Dictionary of Jamaican English (Cambridge, 1967); Frank Collymore, Notes for a Glossary of Words and Phrases of Barbadian Dialect (Bridgetown, 1970); J. Graham Cruickshank, Black Talk, being Notes on Negro Dialect in British Guiana (Demerara, 1916); Carlton R. Ottley, Creole Talk of Trinidad and Tobago (Port-of-Spain, 1971); and the glossary in Hyman Rodman, Lower-Class Families in the Culture of Poverty in Negro Trinidad (Oxford, 1971).
2. Discussion of some of the other items which appeared in this questionnaire and provided evidence of sharp discontinuities in the linguistic competence of Blacks and Whites is contained in J. Rickford, "Carrying the New Wave Into Syntax - The Case of B. E. BIN" in Proceedings of the Second Annual Colloquium on New Ways of Analysing Variation ed. Roger Shuy (Washington D.C. 1975).
3. Erving Goffman, Relations in Public (N.Y. 1972), 28-61.
4. Ibid., 39.
5. Ibid., 61.
6. Compare one of the standard rejoinders to verbal insult or mockery: "Sticks and stones can break my bones,
   But words can never hurt me."
7. Michael "Guow" McTurk, Essays and Fables in the Vernacular (Georgetown 1899).

8. Roger Abrahams, "The Training of the Man of Words in Talking Broad," in Rappin' and Stylin' Out, ed. Thomas Kochman (Urbana, 1972), 215-240.

9. Cassidy and LePage, 139, Compare also the brief descriptions in Collymore, 38 and Cruickshank, 31.

10. Miss Nation's contributions to the Dictionary were made on the basis of her analysis of the spontaneous conversation of Jamaican children.

11. This is one of the useful terms for the basic units of contrast in body-motion communication derived from Ray L. Birdwhistell, Kinesics and Context (N.Y. 1970).

12. Kenneth Johnson, "Black Kinesics — Some Non-Verbal Communication patterns in the Black Culture," Florida Foreign Language Reporter (Spring/Fall 1971), 17-20.

13. Benjamin Cooke, "Non-Verbal Communication among Afro-Americans — and Initial Classification," in Rappin' and Stylin' Out, 32-64.

14. Compare the list of "key" languages in Lorenzo Dow Turner, Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect (Chicago 1949), with the list in David Dalby, "The African Element in American English," in Rappin' and Stylin' Out, 170-186.

15. On this point, see Mervyn C. Alleyne, "Acculturation and the Cultural Matrix of Creolization" in Pidginization and Creolization of Languages, ed. Dell Hymes (Cambridge, 1971), 175-76, and Ian F. Hancock, A Study of the Sources and

Development of the Lexicon of Sierra Leone Krio (Ph.D. Thesis, U. of London, 1971), 652.

16. This metaphorical reference to "breaking the back of the eye" is evocative of the straining of the eye muscles which one actually feels when delivering a good cut-eye.

17. For all Yoruba examples cited in this paper, v́ = high tone, v = mid tone, v̀ = low tone, and v᷄ = mid-high rising tone.

18. R. C. Abraham, Dictionary of Modern Yoruba (London, 1958), 423 and 427.

19. Peter Ladefoged, Linguistic Phonetics (Los Angeles, 1967), and D. Westerman and Ida C. Ward, Practical Phonetics for Students of African Languages (London, 1933).

20. Cruickshank, 50.

21. Cassidy and LePage, 428.

22. Rodman, 235.

23. Collymore, 30-31.

24. Ibid.

25. Some of the Black females pointed out that "titting your teeth" is sometimes used instead of "sucking your teeth" for the same gesture.

26. Richard Allsopp, "The Language We Speak," Kyk-Over-Al 3, no.11, (October, 1950), 25.

27. We wish to thank Richard Allsopp for contributing this example.

28. R. C. Abraham, 490, describes ò ṣé (la) as "a sigh denoting unhappiness". I. O. Delano, A Dictionary of Yoruba Monosyllabic

Verbs, 2 (Ife, 1969), 91, glosses pose thus: "to express impatience or dissatisfaction by saying 'pshaw.'".

29. Cassidy and LePage, 441.

30. Ibid.

31. Karl Reisman, "Cultural and Linguistic Ambiguity in a West Indian Village," in Afro-American Anthropology, ed. Norman E. Whitten Jr. and John F. Szwed, (N.Y, 1970), 132-133.

32. Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (N.Y. 1941).

33. On this point, see Frederic G. Cassidy, "Multiple Etymologies in Jamaican Creole," American Speech 4 (1961), 211-214, and Jay G. Edwards, "African Influences on the English of San Andres Island, Colombia," in Pidgins and Creoles: Current Trends and Prospects, ed. David DeCamp and Ian F. Hancock (Washington D.C. 1974). 1-26.

34. Like "O.K.", the informal signal of assent or agreement, which is discussed in David Dalby, "The African Element in American English," in Rappin' and Stylin' Out, 170-186.

35. Ibid., 174.

36. Reisman, 132-133.

37. Ibid., 133

38. Reisman (ibid.) provides the most detailed discussion of the different ways in which all kinds of linguistic and cultural symbols in Antigua have been subject to a process of re-modelling and reinterpretation which allows them to "mediate at least two sets of cultural identities and meanings."

39. This paper represents a revised version of a paper entitled "Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth" originally prepared in June 1973, and circulated in mimeo. We wish to thank Karl Reisman and Ian Hancock, who helped with data collection and provided both encouragement and criticism. We should also like to thank the many Americans who participated in our questionnaire, and the various West Indian and African informants, too numerous to mention by name.

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